

Mass in Motion: Stories from the Field

Making Partnerships Work in Fitchburg

Community gardens, healthy vending, and safe routes to parks are all innovative ways to create opportunities for healthy eating and active living. Yet without partnerships and effective meetings, no healthy living initiative would be able to get off the ground.

"It's one thing to host a meeting, it's another to get policy makers, residents, and local youth at the same table," points out Mary Gianetti, Montachusett Opportunity Council's (MOC) Nutrition and Wellness Director. Fitchburg wasted no time in tackling both issues as the Mass in Motion team, *Fun n' FITchburg*, met with City of Fitchburg staff to identify all partners needed to make real change in their community. The list of partners was given to the Mayor, about 25 at first, who sent invitations to various community stakeholders in city government, law enforcement, non-profit organizations, local businesses, healthcare, farmers markets, schools, community gardens, recreation, and food and nutrition. Equally important to have in the mix were eight youth peer leaders and two recently hired Resident Neighborhood Mobilizers to engage adults

and parents. Before they knew it, all the right people were interested and involved.

Fun n' FITchburg got creative to keep participation high. They offered healthy snacks and beverages at meetings, made sure everyone had a chance to give feedback and make their voices heard, and brought residents and policy makers key to decision making directly into the discussion.



Members attend Fun n' FITchburg meetings in high numbers.

A best-practice to keeping members interested has been the inclusion of those who cannot attend meetings in person. "We really focused on bringing the meetings to the members, not the other way around," says MOC's Wellness Coordinator Nancy

Fillers. Members who are unable to attend meetings are emailed a Survey Monkey so they can still vote on any issues that come up among those present at the meeting. Also, the planning team emails meeting minutes to all members and posts them on the *Fun 'n FITchburg* page of the City's website. That way, the minutes are available to partners and the community at large.

"This is so much bigger than I ever imagined when we first got the Mass in Motion funding," stated Steve Curry, Fitchburg's Board of Health Director. Fitchburg now includes one of the largest partnerships among the Mass in Motion communities, with 75 key stakeholders and approximately 20 to 30 attending each monthly meeting. *Fun 'n FITchburg* demonstrated that strategic planning for recruitment, inclusive meetings, and strong outreach to all members (regardless of whether they can come to meetings) are key to keeping members interested and motivated to attend future meetings.

By bringing together key organizations that never worked together before, they are uniting as part of a larger vision to make Fitchburg a safer and healthier place.

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